

SECTION
1

Changing Ways of Life

MAIN IDEA

Americans experienced cultural conflicts as customs and values changed in the 1920s.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The way in which different groups react to change continues to cause conflict today.

Terms & Names

- Prohibition
- speakeasy
- bootlegger
- fundamentalism
- Clarence Darrow
- Scopes trial

One American's Story

As the 1920s dawned, social reformers who hoped to ban alcohol—and the evils associated with it—rejoiced. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, banning the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol, took effect in January of 1920. Billy Sunday, an evangelist who preached against the evils of drinking, predicted a new age of virtue and religion.

A PERSONAL VOICE BILLY SUNDAY

“The reign of tears is over! The slums will soon be only a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. Men will walk upright now, women will smile and the children will laugh. Hell will be forever for rent!”

—quoted in *How Dry We Were: Prohibition Revisited*

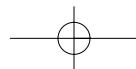
Sunday's dream was not to be realized in the 1920s, as the law proved unenforceable. The failure of Prohibition was a sign of cultural conflicts most evident in the nation's cities. Lured by jobs and by the challenge and freedom that the city represented, millions of people rode excitedly out of America's rural past and into its urban future.



▲
1920s evangelist
Billy Sunday

Rural and Urban Differences

America changed dramatically in the years before 1920, as was revealed in the 1920 census. According to figures that year, 51.2 percent of Americans lived in communities with populations of 2,500 to more than 1 million. Between 1922 and 1929, migration to the cities accelerated, with nearly 2 million people leaving farms and towns each year. “Cities were the place to be, not to get away from,” said one historian. The agricultural world that millions of Americans left behind was largely unchanged from the 19th century—that world was one of small towns and farms bound together by conservative moral values and close social relationships. Yet small-town attitudes began to lose their hold on the American mind as the city rose to prominence.



THE NEW URBAN SCENE At the beginning of the 1920s, New York, with a population of 5.6 million people, topped the list of big cities. Next came Chicago, with nearly 3 million, and Philadelphia, with nearly 2 million. Another 65 cities claimed populations of 100,000 or more, and they grew more crowded by the day. Life in these booming cities was far different from the slow-paced, intimate life in America's small towns. Chicago, for instance, was an industrial powerhouse, home to native-born whites and African Americans, immigrant Poles, Irish, Russians, Italians, Swedes, Arabs, French, and Chinese. Each day, an estimated 300,000 workers, 150,000 cars and buses, and 20,000 trolleys filled the pulsing downtown. At night people crowded into ornate movie theaters and vaudeville houses offering live variety shows.

For small-town migrants, adapting to the urban environment demanded changes in thinking as well as in everyday living. The city was a world of competition and change. City dwellers read and argued about current scientific and social ideas. They judged one another by accomplishment more often than by background. City dwellers also tolerated drinking, gambling, and casual dating—worldly behaviors considered shocking and sinful in small towns. **A**

For all its color and challenge, though, the city could be impersonal and frightening. Streets were filled with strangers, not friends and neighbors. Life was fast-paced, not leisurely. The city demanded endurance, as a foreign visitor to Chicago observed.

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

A How did small-town life and city life differ?

"How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paree?"

POPULAR SONG OF THE 1920S

A PERSONAL VOICE WALTER L. GEORGE

"It is not for nothing that the predominating color of Chicago is orange. It is as if the city, in its taxicabs, in its shop fronts, in the wrappings of its parcels, chose the color of flame that goes with the smoky black of its factories. It is not for nothing that it has repelled the geometric street arrangement of New York and substituted . . . great ways with names that a stranger must learn if he can. . . . He is in a [crowded] city, and if he has business there, he tells himself, 'If I weaken I shan't last long.'"

—*Hail Columbia!*

History Through Art

SONG OF THE TOWERS

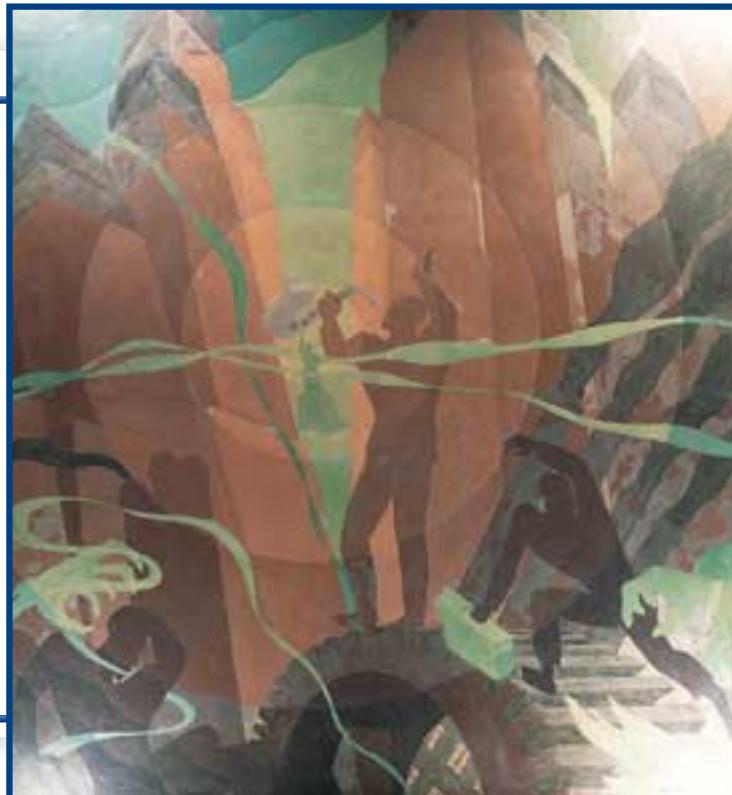
This mural by Aaron Douglas is part of a series he painted inside the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library to symbolize different aspects of African-American life during the 1920s. In this panel, *Song of the Towers*, he depicts figures before a city backdrop. As seen here, much of Douglas's style was influenced by jazz music and geometric shapes.

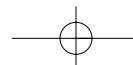
SKILLBUILDER Analyzing Visual Sources

1. What is the focal point of this panel?
2. What parts of this painting might be symbolic of African Americans' move north?
3. How does Douglas represent new freedoms in this mural? Support your answer with examples.



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK,
PAGE R23.





DIFFICULT DECISIONS

TO PROHIBIT ALCOHOL OR NOT?

The question of whether to outlaw alcohol divided Americans. Many believed the government should make alcohol illegal to protect the public, while others believed it was a personal decision, and not morally wrong.

1. Examine the pros and cons of each position. Which do you agree with? What other factors, if any, do you think would influence your position?
2. If you had been a legislator asked to vote for the Eighteenth Amendment, what would you have said? Explain.
3. What happens when the government legislates moral values? Give contemporary examples to support your answer.

In the city, lonely migrants from the country often ached for home. Throughout the 1920s, Americans found themselves caught between rural and urban cultures—a tug that pitted what seemed to be a safe, small-town world of close ties, hard work, and strict morals against a big-city world of anonymous crowds, moneymakers, and pleasure seekers.

THE PROHIBITION EXPERIMENT One vigorous clash between small-town and big-city Americans began in earnest in January 1920, when the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect. This amendment launched the era known as **Prohibition**, during which the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages were legally prohibited.

Reformers had long considered liquor a prime cause of corruption. They thought that too much drinking led to crime, wife and child abuse, accidents on the job, and other serious social problems. Support for Prohibition came largely from the rural South and West, areas with large populations of native-born Protestants. The church-affiliated Anti-Saloon League had led the drive to pass the Prohibition amendment. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which considered drinking a sin, had helped push the measure through.

At first, saloons closed their doors, and arrests for drunkenness declined. But in the aftermath of World War I, many Americans were tired of making sacrifices; they wanted to enjoy life. Most immigrant groups did not consider drinking a sin but a natural part of socializing, and they resented government meddling.

Eventually, Prohibition's fate was sealed by the government, which failed to budget enough money to enforce the law. The Volstead Act established a Prohibition Bureau in the Treasury Department in 1919, but the agency was underfunded. The job of enforcement involved patrolling 18,700 miles of coastline as well as inland borders, tracking down illegal stills (equipment for distilling liquor), monitoring highways for truckloads of illegal alcohol, and overseeing all the industries that legally used alcohol to be sure none was siphoned off for illegal purposes. The task fell to approximately 1,500 poorly paid federal agents and local police—clearly an impossible job.

SPEAKEASIES AND BOOTLEGGERS To obtain liquor illegally, drinkers went underground to hidden saloons and nightclubs known as **speakeasies**—so called because when inside, one spoke quietly, or “easily,” to avoid detection.

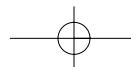
Speakeasies could be found everywhere—in penthouses, cellars, office buildings, rooming houses, tenements, hardware stores, and tearooms. To be admitted to a speakeasy, one had to present a card or use a password. Inside, one would find a mix of fashionable middle-class and upper-middle-class men and women.

Before long, people grew bolder in getting around the law. They learned to distill alcohol and built their own stills. Since alcohol was allowed for medicinal and religious purposes, prescriptions



◀ A young woman demonstrates one of the means used to conceal alcohol—hiding it in containers strapped to one's legs. ▶




MAIN IDEA
Developing Historical Perspective

B Why do you think the Eighteenth Amendment failed to eliminate alcohol consumption?

for alcohol and sales of sacramental wine (intended for church services) skyrocketed. People also bought liquor from **bootleggers** (named for a smuggler's practice of carrying liquor in the legs of boots), who smuggled it in from Canada, Cuba, and the West Indies. "The business of evading [the law] and making a mock of it has ceased to wear any aspects of crime and has become a sort of national sport," wrote the journalist H. L. Mencken. **B**

ORGANIZED CRIME Prohibition not only generated disrespect for the law, it also contributed to organized crime in nearly every major city. Chicago became notorious as the home of Al Capone, a gangster whose bootlegging empire netted over \$60 million a year. Capone took control of the Chicago liquor business by killing off his competition. During the 1920s, headlines reported 522 bloody gang killings and made the image of flashy Al Capone part of the folklore of the period. In 1940, the writer Herbert Asbury recalled the Capone era in Chicago.

A PERSONAL VOICE HERBERT ASBURY

"The famous seven-ton armored car, with the pudgy gangster lolling on silken cushions in its darkened recesses, a big cigar in his fat face, and a \$50,000 diamond ring blazing from his left hand, was one of the sights of the city; the average tourist felt that his trip to Chicago was a failure unless it included a view of Capone out for a spin. The mere whisper: 'Here comes Al,' was sufficient to stop traffic and to set thousands of curious citizens craning their necks along the curbing."

—*Gem of the Prairie*

MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Effects

C How did criminals take advantage of Prohibition?

By the mid-1920s, only 19 percent of Americans supported Prohibition. The rest, who wanted the amendment changed or repealed, believed that Prohibition caused worse effects than the initial problem. Rural Protestant Americans, however, defended a law that they felt strengthened moral values. The Eighteenth Amendment remained in force until 1933, when it was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment. **C**

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

AL CAPONE

By age 26, Al Capone headed a criminal empire in Chicago, which he controlled through the use of bribes and violence. From 1925 to 1931, Capone bootlegged whiskey from Canada, operated illegal breweries in Chicago, and ran a network of 10,000 speakeasies. In 1927, the "Big Fellow," as he liked to be called, was worth an estimated \$100 million.

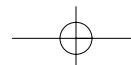
The end came quickly for Capone, though. In 1931, the gangster chief was arrested for tax evasion and went to jail. That was the only crime of which the authorities were ever able to convict him. Capone was later released from jail, but he died several years later at age 48.

Prohibition, 1920–1933
Causes

- Various religious groups thought drinking alcohol was sinful.
- Reformers believed that the government should protect the public's health.
- Reformers believed that alcohol led to crime, wife and child abuse, and accidents on the job.
- During World War I, native-born Americans developed a hostility to German-American brewers and toward other immigrant groups that used alcohol.

Effects

- Consumption of alcohol declined.
- Disrespect for the law developed.
- An increase in lawlessness, such as smuggling and bootlegging, was evident.
- Criminals found a new source of income.
- Organized crime grew.



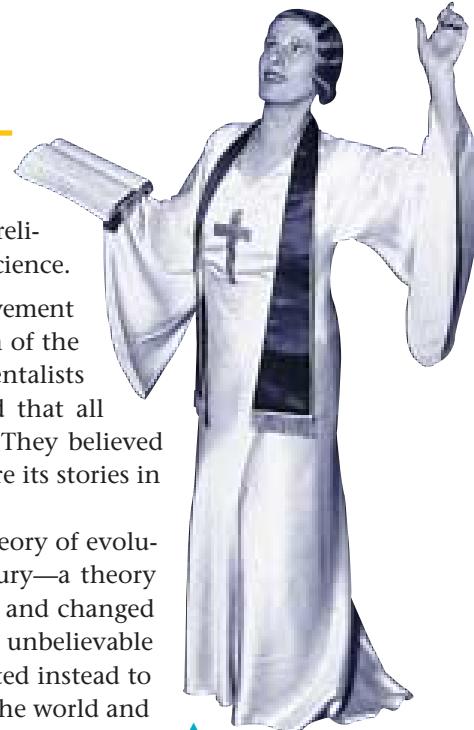
Science and Religion Clash

Another bitter controversy highlighted the growing rift between traditional and modern ideas during the 1920s. This battle raged between fundamentalist religious groups and secular thinkers over the truths of science.

AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISM The Protestant movement grounded in a literal, or nonsymbolic, interpretation of the Bible was known as **fundamentalism**. Fundamentalists were skeptical of scientific knowledge; they argued that all important knowledge could be found in the Bible. They believed that the Bible was inspired by God, and that therefore its stories in all their details were true.

Their beliefs led fundamentalists to reject the theory of evolution advanced by Charles Darwin in the 19th century—a theory stating that plant and animal species had developed and changed over millions of years. The claim they found most unbelievable was that humans had evolved from apes. They pointed instead to the Bible's account of creation, in which God made the world and all its life forms, including humans, in six days.

Fundamentalism expressed itself in several ways. In the South and West, preachers led religious revivals based on the authority of the Scriptures. One of the most powerful revivalists was Billy Sunday, a baseball player turned preacher who staged emotional meetings across the South. In Los Angeles, Aimee Semple McPherson, a theatrical woman who dressed in flowing white satin robes, used Hollywood showmanship to preach the word to homesick Midwestern migrants and devoted followers of her radio broadcasts. In the 1920s, fundamentalism gained followers who began to call for laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution. 



The evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1922

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing
D Summarize the beliefs of fundamentalism.

NOW & THEN

EVOLUTION, CREATIONISM, AND EDUCATION

There is still great controversy today over the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Some people believe that creation theory should be taught as a theory of the origin of life, along with evolution. As recently as 1999, the Kansas State School Board voted to eliminate the teaching of evolution from the curriculum.

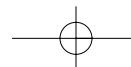
The issue of what should be taught about the origin of life—and who should decide this issue—continues to stir up debate. Some have suggested that science and religion are not necessarily incompatible. They believe that a theory of the origin of life can accommodate both the scientific theory of evolution and religious beliefs.

THE SCOPES TRIAL In March 1925, Tennessee passed the nation's first law that made it a crime to teach evolution. Immediately, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) promised to defend any teacher who would challenge the law. John T. Scopes, a young biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, accepted the challenge. In his biology class, Scopes read this passage from *Civic Biology*: "We have now learned that animal forms may be arranged so as to begin with the simple one-celled forms and culminate with a group which includes man himself." Scopes was promptly arrested, and his trial was set for July.

The ACLU hired **Clarence Darrow**, the most famous trial lawyer of the day, to defend Scopes. William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic candidate for president and a devout fundamentalist, served as a special prosecutor. There was no real question of guilt or innocence: Scopes was honest about his action. The **Scopes trial** was a fight over evolution and the role of science and religion in public schools and in American society.

The trial opened on July 10, 1925, and almost overnight became a national sensation. Darrow called Bryan as an expert on the Bible—the contest that everyone had been waiting for. To handle the throngs of Bryan supporters, Judge Raulston moved the court outside, to a platform built under the maple trees. There, before a crowd of several

Vocabulary
culminate: to come to completion; end



thousand, Darrow relentlessly questioned Bryan about his beliefs. Bryan stood firm, a smile on his face.

A PERSONAL VOICE

CLARENCE DARROW AND WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

Mr. Darrow— “You claim that everything in the Bible should be literally interpreted?”

Mr. Bryan— “I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there. Some of the Bible is given illustratively. For instance: ‘Ye are the salt of the earth.’ I would not insist that man was actually salt, or that he had flesh of salt, but it is used in the sense of salt as saving God’s people.”

—quoted in *Bryan and Darrow at Dayton*

“When Shall We Three Meet Again?”



MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

E What was the conflict between fundamentalists and those who accepted evolution?

Darrow asked Bryan if he agreed with Bishop James Ussher's calculation that, according to the Bible, Creation happened in 4004 B.C. Had every living thing on earth appeared since that time? Did Bryan know that ancient civilizations had thrived before 4004 B.C.? Did he know the age of the earth?

Bryan grew edgy but stuck to his guns. Finally, Darrow asked Bryan, “Do you think the earth was made in six days?” Bryan answered, “Not six days of 24 hours.” People sitting on the lawn gasped. **E**

With this answer, Bryan admitted that the Bible might be interpreted in different ways. But in spite of this admission, Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. The Tennessee Supreme Court later changed the verdict on a technicality, but the law outlawing the teaching of evolution remained in effect.

This clash over evolution, the Prohibition experiment, and the emerging urban scene all were evidence of the changes and conflicts occurring during the 1920s. During that period, women also experienced conflict as they redefined their roles and pursued new lifestyles.

A 1925 newspaper cartoon portrays Bryan (left) and Darrow (right) at the close of the Scopes “monkey” trial on the teaching of evolution, so-called because of a theory of evolution that humans evolved from apes.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES

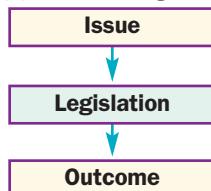
For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Prohibition
- bootlegger
- speakeasy
- fundamentalism
- Clarence Darrow
- Scopes trial

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Create two diagrams like the one below. Show how government attempted to deal with (a) problems thought to stem from alcohol use and (b) the teaching of evolution.



Was the legislation effective? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING ISSUES

How might the overall atmosphere of the 1920s have contributed to the failure of Prohibition?

4. ANALYZING CAUSES

Why do you think organized crime spread so quickly through the cities during the 1920s? Explain your answer.

5. EVALUATING

Do you think the passage of the Volstead Act and the ruling in the Scopes trial represented genuine triumphs for traditional values?

Think About:

- changes in urban life in the 1920s
- the effects of Prohibition
- the legacy of the Scopes trial